



Voter Pre Registration

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Position Statement

The State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council supports legislation that lowers the voting registration age to sixteen.

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It is the position of the State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council that the state of Iowa enact legislation that lowers the age that youth can register to vote from from seventeen and one-half years of age to sixteen years of age.

Rationale

In the state of Iowa, youth may register to vote provided they are seventeen and one-half years of age and meet all other requirements (Iowa Code Election Laws §48A.5(2)(c))). Under the current system, minors register with an eligibility date of their eighteenth birthday. Lowering the voter registration age from seventeen and one-half years of age to sixteen years of age would make it easier for Iowa's youth to register to vote and has the potential to increase youth turnout in elections.

Registration at sixteen creates many more contact points that allow for opportunities for youth to pre-register. Through outreach by civics classes, government agencies, and third party registration drives, registration is made much more accessible. When sixteen and seventeen year olds obtain their intermediate or full license, for example, they would be able to complete a voter registration form at the DMV. Schools would also be able to target more of their students through voter registration drives.

Students would be further engaged in the political process through earlier registration. By registering, they would have more direct contact with campaigns and state parties, and election officials would be able to provide young people with necessary information, such as requirements, polling place locations, and early voting. When young people receive information and support regarding participation in the political process, they are empowered to be civically engaged.

Voter turnout in people ages 18-24 remains the lowest of any age group. In 2008, less than half of voters between 18-24 voted in the election. According to a report from the U.S. Census Bureau, only 58.5% of eligible voters between 18-24 were registered, far lower than registration rates of any other age group. Of the 58.5% who were registered, however, 83% reported voting. By lowering the voter registration age to sixteen, the number of registered young people would likely increase, which, in turn, could increase voter turnout in the 18-24 age group. Currently, ten states, including Florida, California, Louisiana, and Maryland, allow people as young as sixteen to pre-register. In a study conducted by Duke University, preregistration (at the age of 16) was found to increase voter turnout by 13%. Allowing 16 year olds to register increased turnout for both Democrats and Republicans at an effectively equal level.

Recommended Action

To increase accessibility to voter registration and encourage youth political participation, the Iowa General Assembly should pass legislation that would change the current age youth can pre-register to vote from seventeen and one-half years of age to sixteen years of age. Doing so would increase accessibility to voter registration, such as through high school voter outreach and the DM, and could encourage voter turnout in young people, who consistently vote at lower rates than any other age group.

Sources

Duke University. "The Impact of Preregistration on Youth Turnout."

sites.duke.edu/hillygus/files/2014/05/PreregistrationandYouthTurnout_anon.pdf.

United States, Congress, "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2008." *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2008*.